



**King County**

**King County Animal Care and Control  
Response to “Evaluation of Leadership, Human  
Resources and Structural Capacity in King County’s Animal  
Services Program” by Nathan Winograd**

**April 2008**

*The report "Evaluation of Leadership, Human Resources and Structural Capacity in King County's Animal Services Program" by consultant Nathan Winograd contains many helpful suggestions on how King County can improve its sheltering operation for stray and unwanted animals. We too share the author's deep commitment to reducing the euthanasia rate for the approximately 13,000 animals that move through our facilities. Inadequate facilities are rightly noted in the report and have resulted in many challenges for the dedicated Animal Care and Control staff and their daily work. As with other reviews of the operation, the urgent need to replace the facilities is paramount to reducing crowding and stress of animals in our care.*

*I am disappointed to find that the report also contains very serious unfounded statements, inaccuracies, and accusations regarding King County Animal Care and Control (KCACC)'s organization as a whole; the care and treatment of animals; and our staffing and resources. It is essential that the record reflect corrections to these parts of the report.*

*The following report provides responses, comments and clarifications from managers and staff on the ground who interact with these animals daily and who are accountable for the well-being of animals in our shelters. Responses are organized by subject matter and reference the appropriate page numbers of the refuted statements.*

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "James J. Buck". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "James" and last name "Buck" clearly legible.

County Administrative Officer  
Department of Executive Services

## **Animal care**

*(Report pages 59-64, 90-102, 113-116 and throughout)*

The most disturbing accusations against KCACC are simply not true. We do provide food and water for all animals and we do clean holding spaces. The consultant provides no evidence to support his claims otherwise. Animals did not experience time periods of more than 24 hours without food and water. Shelter records show that all animals in the shelter had their cages cleaned and were given food and water in the morning and evening on Sunday and again on the following Monday evening in question. This is validated by signed staff affidavits. No specific examples of staff displaying ignorance of basic animal care and behavior are cited. The dedicated staff at KCACC care deeply for the animals at our shelters.

King County does not and will not intentionally let animals die in their cages without treatment. When reporting “animals that die in custody,” these statistics were included in the 2006 Annual Report provided to Council. Deaths in custody have gone up, but have not “skyrocketed”. In 2006, there were 140 incidents; in 2007, there were 216. In the first two months of 2008, the number is 16. Conclusions must be drawn from factual statistics kept by KCACC, not from hearsay submitted by third parties.

Routine shelter operations include an initial evaluation prior to the animal being placed in the shelter. Animals are treated for afflictions like ear mites, tapeworms, fleas, and roundworms, among others.

Animal care protocols at our shelters are continually evolving. Recently implemented work checklists have led to significant improvements in shelter cleaning and care. The checklist system was first used on February 16, with staff in the process of familiarizing themselves with the new system when the consultant visited.

## **Shelter illness**

The vaccination process and associated documentation protocols are continually under review and improving. KCACC is in the process of determining how to best utilize the Chameleon software for this task. While vaccination and cleaning protocols are in place, they alone are not enough to prevent disease transmission. Current disease incidents are caused by a variety of factors, including shelter overcrowding and animal stress.

Consultant comments regarding the presence of parvovirus epidemics at the shelter are overstated. In the past, we have had isolated cases of parvovirus, typically coming into our shelter from the outside. While dogs come into the shelter with Parvo, prevention is key and our cleaning protocols and sewer drain covers have greatly improved our ability to prevent spread and contamination.

Kittens and nursing mothers are typically separated from the rest of the cat population. However, when a pregnant mother gives birth in a cage (and not in

the nursery) the cat and her litter are kept in their cage and not moved for a short period of time. If a mother cat is sick, they will not be placed in the nursery with other mothers, in order to prevent the spread of illness.

### **Veterinarian care**

Medical treatment is available at the Kent shelter six days per week. Veterinary staff coverage was recently increased from four days to six days and includes twice-daily rounds. Every animal is inspected for any conditions that require medical attention. Injured animals from the field are taken to emergency vets immediately for evaluation. They are only returned to the shelter if they do not need 24-hour care.

Animals at the Crossroads Shelter, who are in need of care, are injured or are sick, are either sent to Kent shelter for veterinarian care or to an emergency vet.

As a result of the increased veterinarian coverage, KCACC has been able to provide services beyond those typical of the shelter (spay/neuter). KCACC is able to alter feral cats for South County Cats, a service that previously wasn't possible.

KCACC also hosts Pasado's Spay Station at the Kent shelter as often as twice each month.

When animals become sick at the shelter, there are cleaning protocols in place to minimize transmission to the other animals. Because we have an open admission policy, it is not possible to prevent illness from entering the shelter. The shelter facilities are overcrowded and the lack of sufficient isolation areas for sick animals means we are not always able to separate them from the rest of the population; a primary element of appropriate disease transmission prevention.

### **Euthanasia**

Euthanasia practices were improperly defined in the report. Euthanasia of cats occurs via inter-peritoneal injection (in the stomach) of sodium pentobarbital, and is a standard method. This reduces animal handling and stress. The animal is injected, placed into a cage and simply falls asleep. Once this occurs, the animal is checked for vital signs: a blink reaction, breathing, heartbeat. This is common practice in the animal care and control community.

KCACC officers who perform euthanasia must be trained and approved by the shelter veterinarian before they are given permission to euthanize. When sedatives are required for compassionate euthanasia, they are provided and used. Many animals are euthanized in the euthanasia room, and are not euthanized in front of other animals, per KCACC protocol. The cages that are stored in that room are occasionally used for holding animals already euthanized. Occasionally it is necessary to euthanize dogs in their kennel, due to injury or another physical condition that does not allow moving into the euthanasia room.

Euthanasia decisions are part of the daily operations of the shelter. We try to

save as many animals as possible, which sometimes results in a longer stay in the shelter.

### **Specific examples**

- When the consultant referenced animal control officers giving medications to animals with contagious diseases and then continuing to medicate healthy cats, the officer in question provided a statement that the consultant was observing her do this, but was not watching when she did in fact dip her hands in the cleaning bowl. (Page 80)
- In reference to the foster cat from Crossroads that died in foster care, the officer in question did provide care for the foster animal, including fluids and medication. And she also provided the foster volunteer with subcutaneous fluids and medication for the animal and showed the volunteer how to use them. KCACC does not restrict fostering following this incident, but we did try to improve our practice of following our own protocol of completing training before fostering. We had been allowing foster parents to start fostering if they agreed to come to the next training.
- Staff Veterinarian reported that she did state to the consultant that the continuous feeding of pregnant mothers is an ongoing problem. The Veterinarian said she was concerned about mothers in the nursery having continuous food. The mother in question was provided food on the day in question. The officer that cleaned the cage has provided a statement that he provided food for the mother to eat while cleaning the cage. However, KCACC protocols would require that the mother be provided with continual food, so this protocol was not followed and employee has been counseled on this issue.
- The cat with ear mites, #A023160 discussed on page 81 was left on the doorstep of the Shelter on 2/15/08. There was a bottle of antibiotics, Cefa-Drops, on top of the kennel, the label and instructions removed. There was no owner information or background so we booked her in as a stray. The notation in the medical field on 2/19/08 regarding the ear mites was information for the vet staff in addition to the needed FeLV test and spay. Neither employee ever indicated on her kennel card concerns about ear mites, a medical flag (we still don't know what that means), or that she could not interact with volunteers. However it is policy that volunteers do not handle cats until staff have performed a temperament test. The reason she was not taken to Kent until 2/21/08 is because that is when her stray hold ended.
- The accusations of no food, water and cleaning are not substantiated. There are signed work documents and signed statements to the contrary. In addition, the claim that these animals in the isolation area are an "afterthought" is inconsistent with the responsibility of staff to force feed the cats in this room and provide them with subcutaneous fluids. It also is not supported by the number of animals being treated and later being

placed in homes. Of the 24 animals in the isolation room at the time of consultant's February 18 visit, 23 of them are still alive.

## **Shelter conditions**

*(Report pages 30-59, 84-90 and throughout)*

Cleaning the shelter each day is a time consuming process and because it may take hours for staff to clean each of the kennels sufficiently, all animals are fed first thing in the morning before cleaning, rather than make them wait hours for all the kennels to be cleaned. Cats and dogs do not sit all day in filthy kennels; kennels are dirty in the morning before cleaning, but are monitored and kept clean all day. Spot cleaning is performed with a scooper, or a plastic bag.

Removing a cat from its cage and placing it in a temporary cat cage without cleaning in between would be outside of our protocols. Currently KCACC cleans around cats in occupied cages in the morning and deep cleans vacant cages, a practice recommended by the UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program. KCACC or volunteers spot clean cages throughout the day.

When staff cleans a certain part of the shelter, it is indicated on a checklist. These checklists are then thoroughly reviewed by Sergeants, along with the inspection of the work that has been done, including the dog kennels.

## **Upgrades**

The Kent shelter is old and in need of crucial upgrades. The Executive proposed nearly \$500,000 in capital improvements to the existing facility in the 2008 budget to assist in alleviating current overcrowding.

The isolation area is currently undergoing heater, fan and sink renovations to allow us to better treat and save ill animals. While these renovations occur, the animals will remain protected. There are plans in place to ease the impact on the animals and protect them from the ongoing work.

During the consultant visit in January, cats were housed in the hall adjacent to the stray dog area. Since that visit, these cages have been moved out of the hall, and into a new cat area. The "breezeway" area between buildings at the Kent shelter is only used during warmer months.

Despite the limited space, a cat cuddling area was created in the staff conference room for volunteers to provide crucial human exposure to shelter cats.

## **Specific examples**

- The new cleaning protocols and the checklist have improved the cleanliness and smell of the shelter. Lobbies and hallways are cleaned routinely, as is supported by checklist data. It is possible that the stench of urine and fecal matter (since it is away from kennels) could be caused by an intake animal entering the lobby and relieving itself. The checklist



























